

Discrimination by Color or Class in Mexico?

By Laura Randallⁱ

Whether differences in the living conditions of various groups of people reflect their attributes or prejudice against them is an abiding topic of discussion. This discussion has been less frequent in Mexico than in either the United States or Brazil. Although skin color is not a unique determinant of voting patterns, it often influences daily behavior and political orientation.

The purpose of this article is to present some indicators of the differences in living conditions among white, light brown, dark brown and indigenous people in Mexico in 2006. The data come from three surveys of the same respondents of how voters intended to vote, carried out by the *The Mexico 2006 Panel Study*ⁱⁱ. The respondents' reported characteristics are almost identical in the surveys; I therefore use data from the first survey in this article.

The first survey was carried out from October 8 to October 16, 2005, when 458 white (güero/piel Blanca), 1164 light brown (Moreno claro), and 765 dark brown (Moreno oscuro) dark brown Mexicans provided information about their skin color, education and the socioeconomic status of their dwelling. Smaller categories of skin color (negro, chino, etc.) are not included in this analysis. Their living conditions of white, light brown and dark brown Mexicans (Socioeconomic Status, SES) are evaluated both for their housing and for their neighborhood. The classifications of socioeconomic status in the three surveys (MEXICO 2006 PANEL STUDY) are:

LEVEL A

Neighborhoods with large residences, built on plots of 1000 squared meters. They may have a pool, tennis court, pediment, or large garden. They have a garage and three or more luxury cars, as well as private security and guardhouse. They are located in areas with trees, paved roads, and sidewalks in good condition, with underground electric cable and without mass transit. Coded as "1".

LEVEL B

Residential neighborhoods with large houses on plots of 500-1000 squared meters. They have a garage for two cars and, occasionally, a yard. They are located in paved areas with good sidewalks. They have electric cable above ground and, in some areas, under ground. Coded as "2".

LEVEL C

Neighborhoods with finished houses or medium-sized apartments, on surfaces of 150-300 squared meters. The majority have garages for one car. Generally, they do not have a yard or it is very small. This includes subsidized housing units. The areas are paved and have sidewalks. Public transportation runs frequently. Coded as "3".

LEVEL D

Public housing developments (for example, INFONAVIT or FOVISSSTE) with small apartments. Irregular maintenance in the buildings and in the housing complex. Not all areas are paved or have sidewalks. If there are any green spaces, these are poorly kept. Coded as "4".

LEVEL E

Areas with mainly small houses, unfinished. The majority have exposed corrugated metal, wood, cardboard, fiberglass, etc. They are located in poor neighborhoods or in irregular lots. Pavement

is lacking or is in poor conditions. They lack any or all public services, such as running water or electricity. Coded as “5”.ⁱⁱⁱ

The average conditions for each color group show that white Mexicans have more favorable conditions than light brown Mexicans, who in turn are better off than dark brown Mexicans. However, in Mexico, discrimination is more severe against people who identify themselves as indigenous or who speak with an indigenous accent.

Color	SES Housing	SES Neighborhood	Education^{iv}
White	3.53	3.56	5.64
Light Brown	3.83	3.91	5.17
Dark Brown	4.2	4.22	4.18
Indigenous	4.73	4.71	2.83
Indigenous Accent	4.93	4.93	2.09
Discrimination Indicator			Percent less
Light Brown	-0.08	-0.10	8.3
Dark Brown	-0.19	-0.19	25.9
Indigenous	-0.34	-0.32	49.8
Indigenous Accent	-0.39	-0.38	62.9

The coding of housing runs from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most favorable. The discrimination indicator is calculated as the average for white minus the average for another category, divided by the average for white. In the case of housing, the discrimination indicator for Light Brown (give Spanish here) is $(3.53-3.83)$ divided by $3.53 = -.08$, e.g., light brown’s housing is 8 percent worse than that of whites. Dark brown’s housing is 19 percent worse than whites’ housing. Similar discrimination occurs in the neighborhoods in which the two groups live; dark browns are notably less educated than the other two groups. A more nuanced view of discrimination in housing conditions shows that the share of each color group that lives in a given category of housing. There are almost no light or dark browns in the best houses (A); almost as large a share of light browns as whites in the second best houses (B); and a much smaller share of light and dark browns in the third best housing category (C). Light browns are predominantly in the fourth best category (D), and dark browns in the worst category (E). The data for skin color and neighborhood are sufficiently similar to those for skin color and dwelling as to make it unnecessary to provide a separate analysis for this relationship.

	Socioeconomic status of dwelling					
Skin Color and	Percent within skin color category					
Indigenous Accent	A	B	C	D	E	Total
White	0.03	0.06	0.42	0.35	0.14	1.00
Light Brown	0.01	0.05	0.27	0.46	0.21	1.00
Dark Brown	0.00	0.03	0.17	0.37	0.43	1.00
Indigenous	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.12	0.82	1.00
Indigenous Accent	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.93	1.00
	Discrimination Indicator					
(White-Light	0.74	0.20	0.35	-0.30	-0.48	

Brown)/White						
(White-Dark Brown)/White	0.95	0.56	0.59	-0.06	-1.96	
(White-Indigenous)/White	0.82	0.84	0.88	0.66	-4.67	
(White-Indigenous Accent)/White	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.81	-5.48	

The *Reforma* survey treated the “indigenous” category separately from the “skin color” category. People of indigenous background who are dark skinned and well educated might not be coded in the survey as “indigenous”. The analysis of the relationship between indigenous and socioeconomic conditions depends on whether a person is reported as “indigenous” or as having an “indigenous accent”. Those with “indigenous accents” have worse conditions than those who are “indigenous”. Therefore, we look at socioeconomic conditions and education according to accent, in which “class” is a way of identifying accent.

Accent	SES Housing	SES Neighborhood	Education
High class	3.25	3.45	7.16
Typical	3.92	3.96	4.80
Low class	4.17	4.06	4.06
Indigenous	4.93	4.93	2.09

The lower the class, the worse the housing; the worst conditions are those encountered by those with indigenous accents.

The distribution of categories of housing according to accent is:

Percent Within Accent Category					
Socioeconomic status of dwelling					
Accent	A	B	C	D	E
High class	0.05	0.14	0.39	0.31	0.10
Typical	0.00	0.03	0.26	0.43	0.26
Low class	0.00	0.00	0.17	0.49	0.34
Indigenous	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.93
Discrimination Indicator					
High Class-Typical	0.93	0.76	0.33	-0.40	-1.65
High Class-Low Class	1	1	0.56	-0.56	-2.44
High Class-Indigenous	1	1	1	0.79	-8.38

Discrimination is much greater according to “class accent” than according to skin color. The distribution of education is much greater according to class than according to color. The perception of “color” often is determined by socioeconomic status, which is significantly correlated with education. Amelioration of class divisions in Mexico requires improvement in

education, above all that of indigenous peoples, many of whom have received less than complete primary education. Mexico needs far more attention to primary school than to universities.

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ⁱⁱⁱ MEXICO 2006 PANEL STUDY, Criteria for classifying the socioeconomic level of dwellings and neighborhoods

^{iv} Education is coded as level of education, not as years of education. These levels are: 1=no schooling; 2=incomplete primary; 3=complete primary; 4=incomplete middle school, technical school; 5=complete middle school/technical school; 6=incomplete high school; 7=complete high school; 8=incomplete college; and 9=complete college or more.